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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING, STATE FOR NEA/ELA,
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PRER](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: CODEL DODD MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER
SINIORA

Classified By: DCM Christopher W. Murray. Reason Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Prime Minister Fouad Siniora conveyed to Senators Christopher Dodd and John Kerry that Russian President Vladimir Putin supported the formation of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. It remained unclear, however, whether Russia would support the establishment of the Tribunal under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Throughout the meeting, Siniora urged the United States to aid Lebanon by resolving the Sheba'a Farms issue, putting an end to Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory, and by focusing on a peace initiative to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Siniora described these issues as elements that undermine the international peacekeeping force in Lebanon. In addition, Siniora asserted that these chronic problems provide a pretext for Iran, Syria and Hizballah to justify their actions as legitimate defense. End Summary.

POSSIBLE RUSSIAN SUPPORT FOR
INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL

2. (C) Senators Dodd and Kerry, accompanied by staff, the Charge, and Emboffs, met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora at the Grand Serail on December 18. The meeting was also attended by Siniora advisors Mohamed Chattah and Roula Nouredine. Siniora began the hour-long meeting by providing a general readout of his meeting with President Putin in Moscow on December 15. Siniora had discussed the need for the Special Tribunal as a firm demonstration of Lebanese independence and sovereignty, in the face of political assassinations that have been unparalleled in the Arab world. Blaming President Emile Lahoud and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, Siniora stated that he did not believe the political impasse on the Tribunal would be resolved internally.

3. (C) In response to Senator Kerry's inquiry, Siniora explained that while the Russians expressed their support for the Tribunal during Siniora's meetings in Moscow, he had not raised with Putin the specific issue of using Chapter VII of the UN Charter as a means of establishing the Tribunal. Instead, he had informed the Russians of the March 14 Coalition's intent to continue pursuing the Tribunal under normal Lebanese procedures, with the possibility of finding "other means" of establishing it if normal procedures were not successful. Siniora believed that the Russians would

understand this oblique reference to Chapter VII, given that he had previously raised the Chapter VII option directly with the Russian Embassy in Beirut.

PLACING SHEBA'A FARMS UNDER
THE UNITED NATIONS

14. (C) Referring to the Sheba'a Farms as Lebanese territory "occupied by Israel," Siniora argued for placing this 45 square kilometer area under the custody of the United Nations. This approach would not concede a victory to Hizballah, Siniora said. On the contrary, it would "pull the rug out from under Syria, Iran and Hizballah" by removing a fundamental justification for Syrian and Iranian interference, and for Hizballah's claims to its weapons. At the same time, Lebanon could get its territory back. According to Siniora, maintaining the status quo would not help in "removing the fingers of Iran that are extended into Lebanon."

CALL FOR U.S. SUPPORT WITH REGARD
TO ISRAEL; ROLE OF IRAN

15. (C) In addition to Sheba'a Farms, Siniora also urged the United States to aid Lebanon by putting an end to Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory, which were weakening the legitimacy of the United Nations forces in Lebanon. Furthermore, he requested that the United States help resolve the issue of Lebanese detainees in Israel. On a separate note, Siniora registered his complaint that 1.2 million cluster bombs remain on Lebanese territory, which he stated would take another 18 months to clear.

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16. (C) Siniora said the United States needed to place the peace initiative for the Arab-Israeli conflict back on an active track, because non-resolution of the conflict would continue to have repercussions not only in Lebanon, but also in Afghanistan and Iraq. The conflict makes for a "feeling of humiliation" in the Arab world. These after-effects were, in turn, allowing Iranians to hijack Arab causes in the name of "defending Islam."

ROLE OF SYRIA

17. (C) Siniora stated that he desired "excellent relations with Syria, our neighbors," and believed that Syria had played a role in ending Israeli occupation of Lebanon, but Syrian interference in Lebanon needed to end. While the Syrians had agreed verbally that the Sheba'a Farms belonged to Lebanon, they had refused to sign the necessary documentation, when asked by the Siniora government, as a way of maintaining their influence in Lebanon. Nonetheless, Siniora was coy with regard to recommendations on dealing with Syria. He only stated that the United States needed to figure out what the Syrians, who were "hard bargainers," were seeking in exchange for being brought back into the fold of a regular dialogue and improved relations.

CLOSING REMARKS

18. (C) Siniora repeatedly asserted the legitimacy and constitutionality of his government, which he acknowledged was under challenge. He dismissed the size of the recent Hizballah-led street demonstrations, as well as the resignation of the six cabinet ministers. He said he had refused to accept the resignations of the six ministers, and thus his government still comprised Shia ministers. Siniora argued that his government derived its constitutional legitimacy from the fact that it holds the majority in Parliament.

¶9. (C) Siniora said that while he appreciated the words of support from the United States, he appealed for actions that would make an actual difference. According to him, these actions were a resolution of the Sheba'a Farms issue, the ending of Israeli overflights, and a strong effort by the United States to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

¶10. (U) This cable has been cleared by Codel Dodd.

FELTMAN